

Leaving Behind a Legacy of Love (A)

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Today people can expect to live about eighty years. Eighty years of joy, anger, sorrow, happiness, and all the other emotions mixed together may seem like a long time. But if we take away we spend talking, laughing, and having fun with family members and friends, attending weddings and funerals, and time spent lying in bed, only about seven years will remain.

In the moment that a person has lived out his life and his body is laid to rest in the ground, all wealth and glory become nothing more than a bubble and disappear at once. Only the seven years that he lived for the public good will remain and be remembered by posterity. Those seven years are all that is left in the world of a life that lasted eighty years.

We do not come into this world, or depart from it, of our own accord. We have no ability to make choices with regard to our fate. We are born, though we did not choose to be born. We live, though we did not choose to live. We die, though we do not choose to die. We have no authority over these aspects of our lives, so how can we boast that we are somehow better than others? We cannot be born by our own wish, possess things that will forever by our own, or avoid death. So any boasting on our part would only be pathetic.

Even if we rise to a position higher than others, the honor is only temporary. Even if we gather more possessions than others, we must leave them all behind at the gates of death. Money, honor, and knowledge all flow away from us in time, and all disappear with the passing years. No matter how noble and great a person might be, his is nothing more than a pitiable life that will end the moment he loses hold

of his lifeline. Human beings have always struggled to understand who we are and why we must live. We must realize that just as we were not born of our own accord, we are not meant to live for our own sakes.

So the answer to the question of how we should live our lives is simple. We were born of love, so we must live by traveling the path of love. Our lives were created by receiving the boundless love of our parents, so we must live our entire lives repaying that love. In the course of our lives, this is the only value we can choose on our own. The success or failure of our lives depends on how much love we pack into those eighty years that are given to us.

At some point, everyone will shed his physical body like old clothing and die. In Korean, "to return" is a common expression for dying. To return means to go back to where we came from, that is, to go back to our fundamental roots. Everything in the universe moves in cycles. The white snow that collects on the mountains will melt and flow down the slopes, first forming streams and then a river, and eventually go into the ocean. The water that flows into the ocean will absorb the heat of the sun's rays, become water vapor, go back up into the sky, and prepare to become either snowflakes or drops of rain. To return to our original place in this way is what we call death. Then, where do we human beings return to when we die? Body and heart come together to bring about human life, and death is the act of shedding the body. So we go to the place from which the heart came.

We cannot talk about life without also talking about death. We must accurately understand what death is, even if we do so only to understand the purpose of life. The type of life that has true value can be understood only by the person who finds himself in a difficult situation when death appears imminent and he cries out to Heaven in desperation, pleading to be allowed to live even just one more day. If our days are as precious as this, how should we cross over the boundary line of death?

The most important is not to commit sin and to lead a life that is without shadows. There is much religious and philosophical debate over what constitutes sin, but what is clear is that we should not engage in acts that prick our conscience. When we do things that give us a guilty conscience, it always leaves a shadow in our heart.

The next most important thing is to resolve to do significantly more work than others have done. All of our lives are limited, whether that limit is sixty years, seventy years, or some other time period. Depending on how we use that time, we can lead a life that is two or three times more abundant than others. If you cut your time into segments and then live each segment in a meaningful way, your life will be truly precious. Live with an attitude of devotion and diligence, telling yourself, for example, that you will plant two or three trees in the time it takes others to plant one.

Do not live for yourself. You must live not for yourself but for others; for your neighbors more than for your family; for the world more than for your country. All sin in the world comes about when the individual is put first. Individual desires and ambitions harm a person's neighbors and ruin the society at large.

Everything in the world will eventually pass. The parents we love, the husband or wife we love, and the children we love will all pass away. All that remains with us at the end of our lives is death. When a person dies, only his legacy remains.

Please consider for a moment what you can do to show that you lived a life of value. The possessions and social position you have accumulated during your life will pass away from you. Once you cross the river of death, such things will have no meaning. Because we were born in love and lived our lives in love, love is also only thing that remains with us when we are in our graves. We receive our lives in love, live by sharing love, and return into the mist of love. It is important that we live in a way that we can leave a legacy of love behind us.